

March 1990

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the people of Elba, Alabama, those who overcame the loss of everything and those who were affected in other ways. The effect of the flood was felt by all — family, friends, churches, and businesses. I do not know of a single member of the community who has not been touched in some way. These people have earned our respect and admiration for their spirit and attitude in the face of adversity.

The dedication was written by
Gene Kennett, Executive Secretary
of the Elba Chamber of Commerce.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Elba Chamber of Commerce publishes this book for our posterity. We could not have done it without the volunteers who worked so diligently to collect and assemble the information and pictures.

Our appreciation and thanks goes to Liz Murdock and Jean Helms for their enthusiasm in pushing the project, collecting and editing the stories, and knowing how to put the material in order; to Judy Killingsworth for proof reading the collected stories; to Betty Brunson who volunteered her expertise typing the rough draft; to Cara English for furnishing her pictures; to Linda Mills for her ideas, suggestions and expertise in compiling and printing; to the Elba Clipper for publishing our request for stories and pictures; and last but not least, to ALL who took the time to share their stories and pictures with us.

The contents of this book were collected from various sources — letters written to the Chamber of Commerce, newspaper articles, and interviews with citizens of Elba. It was impossible to completely relate the stories; therefore, excerpts were used. The attempt was to inform and entertain the reader.



INTRODUCTION

It had rained 16 inches in 36 hours. The waters on Whitewater Creek and Pea River had been rising steadily. The predictions, as to the crest, were constantly being revised. The local authorities knew Elba was in for some serious problems.

Thanks to our local officials, Mayor Fred Moore and Police Chief Freddy Hanchey, the river was monitored constantly and plans for evacuation were made. While everyone was watching Pea River, little Whitewater Creek had gone on a rampage. This caught many by surprise. Whitewater Creek broke the levee just off highway 87, at the north side of the elementary school at approximately 6:30 A.M., Saturday, March 17, 1990. The people in the downtown area had been warned earlier, and when the sirens began to blow, those who were still in town, knew they were to evacuate and which route to take out of town. In a matter of just a few hours Elba filled up like a fish pond.

An unofficial total of 737 homes, 130 businesses, 86 mobile homes and 8 churches were either under water or badly damaged. An accurate cost figure will never be known. As the months go by, more damage appears. Elba was blessed as there were no lives lost to the flood water; however, some were flood victims even if they did not drown. Many elderly left their homes never to return, and for others the stress and toil of the clean up will never be forgotten.



Several buildings in town experienced their second flood.



Noah had only one flood to contend with, but the people of Elba, a small town in south Alabama, have experienced two devastating floods in their 137 year history. The town square is located on the west bank of Pea River. On an average day this river appears almost lazy, but torrential rains created a raging river in March of 1929 and again in March of 1990.

Other minor floods occurred in Elba in 1888, 1938, 1960 and 1975. The levee prevented major flood losses in 1938, 1960 and 1975.

Information furnished by Corps of Engineers, U. S. Army Mobile District:

| Date of Crest | Gauge Heights |
|----------------|---------------|
| March, 1929 | 43.50 |
| March 17, 1938 | 35.00 |
| April 5, 1960 | 31.50 |
| Feb. 20, 1975 | 37.05 |

Mr. Arthur (Bud) Brunson, lifetime resident of Elba, has been an observer of Pea River for the past 26 years. Living by the Pea River bridge, he makes daily readings of the river and reports them to the Weather Service Forecast Office in Birmingham as part of the river and rainfall network.

Mr. Brunson uses a manual wire weight river gauge to measure the river level. During the flood of 1990, Mr. Brunson and his family evacuated their home for precautionary reasons. Mr. Brunson obtained special permission

from the Coffee County Sheriff's office to go onto the bridge and continue monitoring the river. The National Weather Service recognized Mr. Brunson for his dedication.

INFORMATION FURNISHED BY A. C. BRUNSON, SR.

Thursday — March 15, 1990

7:00 A.M. 8.60 Pea River

Thursday Night

3.90 Rain

Friday — March 16, 1990

| | | |
|------------|-----------------|-----------|
| 7:00 A.M. | 23.05 Pea River | 1.25 Rain |
| 8:00 A.M. | 27.50 Pea River | 2.85 Rain |
| 10:30 A.M. | 29.35 Pea River | 2.73 Rain |
| 1:00 P.M. | 31.30 Pea River | |
| 2:00 P.M. | 32.60 Pea River | |
| 4:00 P.M. | 34.30 Pea River | 1.25 Rain |
| 5:00 P.M. | 36.00 Pea River | 2.45 Rain |
| 6:00 P.M. | 38.00 Pea River | |
| 9:00 P.M. | 39.00 Pea River | |

Water gauge under water after 5:00 P.M. — Unable to gauge rain.

Saturday — March 17, 1990

Possible crest of river 43.75. Crested late afternoon.

Sunday — March 18, 1990

7:00 A.M. 41.90 Pea River

City officials began sounding alarms and notifying residents of Smith Avenue to get out if they expected to walk out because the last exit would soon be closed.

Throughout Friday night, March 16th, city crews worked to evacuate low-lying areas and barricade roads which crossed the levee at Whitewater Bridge, Pea River Bridge and the old railroad trestle. Residents were evacuated first from Riverview, then from other homes in areas outside the levee. At about 10:00 P.M. Friday, officials closed Whitewater Bridge at Smith Avenue, Hwy. 125 at Wise Mill was also closed, and rising waters made Hwy. 203, the Elba Bypass, impassable from Smith Avenue to the Troy Highway. City officials began sounding alarms and notifying residents of Smith Avenue to get out if they expected to walk out because the last exit would soon be closed.

Many Smith Avenue residents escaped north on Highway 125. Edna Sue Stinson expressed gratitude to the people on Highway 125 for opening their homes. For three days the Arthur D. Smith family furnished a barbeque for these Smith Avenue residents.

James and Evelyn Kelley were evacuated from two different areas of town in a period of about six hours. The rapid rising of Whitewater Creek forced them to flee their home in Riverview and seek safety with Buddy and Betty Brunson in Brookdale — only to be awakened at 2:00 Saturday morning by sirens and loudspeakers ordering evacuation of this location. Out they moved again to higher ground as water invaded this part of town. Some areas of Brookdale received up to 4 feet of water.

A story submitted by Franklin A. (Bill) Kelley describes one of several rescues of victims by fellow citizens. Mr. Kelley, his grandchild, Shawn Smart, a young cousin, Michael Smart, and his son-in-law, Ted Smart were rescued from their home on Neil Grantham Drive by David Sutley, Kenneth

Sutley, Greg Bailey and Eugene DeVane. David and Kenneth Sutley carried the children from the porch of the house to Ted Vignola's truck on their shoulders. Ted Smart, unable to swim, was helped through the flooded yard by Eugene DeVane and Greg Bailey.

Also on Friday night, Mrs. Georgia Hoskins, who lives on Neil Grantham Drive, called the police station when she realized water was in her house. At this time all the police and rescue personnel were involved in other rescue activities. Tom Maddox who had just arrived at the police station volunteered his help. After driving through water over the headlights of his pickup truck he and two volunteers were able to rescue Mrs. Hoskins. She had to be half carried and half floated in her wheelchair to the truck. The rising water made it impossible to return to town, so the rescue was completed when safe haven was taken at the local radio station. Tom was unable to return to town until Saturday morning when Charlie Marler and Greg Mills gave him

a ride back to the 203 Bypass by boat. Tom was then able to rejoin his family at the home of Harris and Clair Winston. The family had been evacuated earlier from the Brookdale subdivision.

The break in the levee occurred about 6:00 A.M. Saturday, March 17. The distance between the break and Cook Chevrolet is approximately 200 yards. Within 10 minutes the automobiles in the parking lot of Cook's were under water. As the water continued to travel south toward the square, it rose quickly in the low lying Miller Memorial Stadium. It gushed down the streets past Daniel's Gulf Station and the Methodist Church.

Dennis Lawford, who lived at the corner of Polka and Putnam Street, had left his home at 5:30 A.M. on the 17th, but returned shortly before the levee broke. Mr. Lawford had to swim out of his neighborhood the second time he left. He was careful to swim down the middle of Adkison Street for

Looking west on 203 Bypass/Smith Avenue.

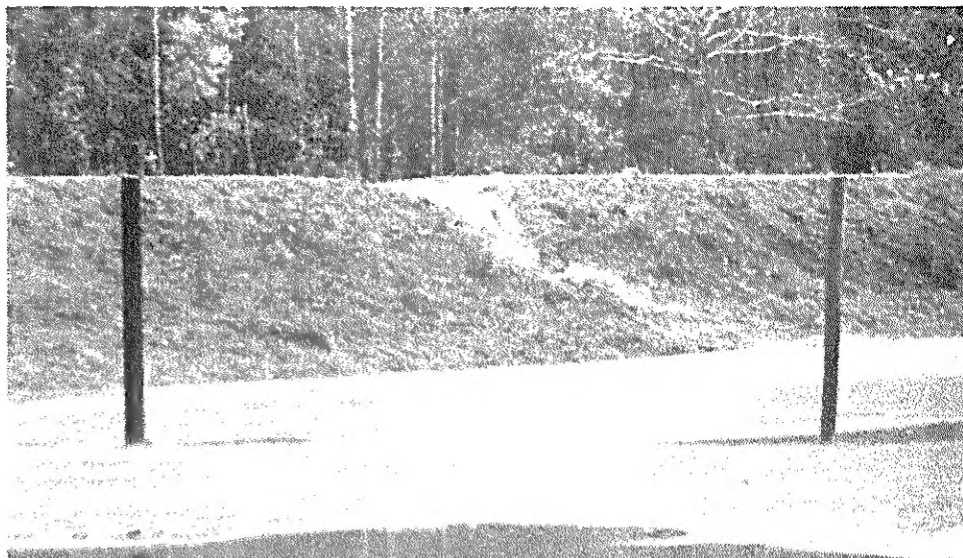


fear of being swept away by sewage drains. Mr. Lawford notified the National Guard of two men on Davis Street who needed rescuing. One was trapped on a utility pole and the other was on top of a truck.

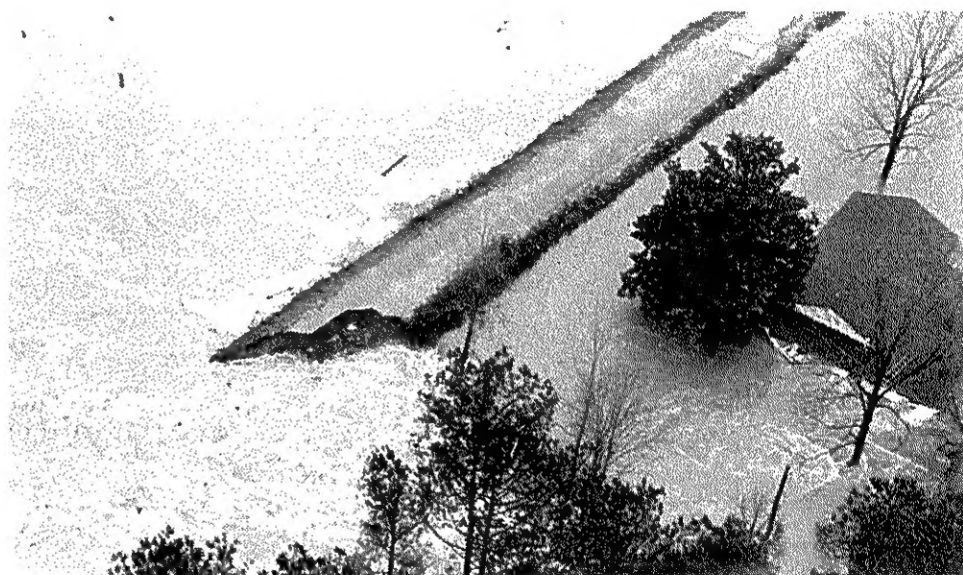
Many people wondered what the inside of their home looked like during the flood. One person, Mark Vaughan, found out for himself. Mark returned to his home by boat. He dived from the boat into the water and swam down to the level of the windows. He then swam through an open window and emerged at the top of the water inside his house. Mark spent several minutes swimming through his home. He saw light and heavy objects floating from room to room, even his refrigerator and piano. Among these floating objects Mark located his daughters' portraits. Taking these treasured possessions with him, Mark dived under the water and swam through the window.

Mrs. Agnes Coleman, who lives on Reddock Hill Road, wrote of the anguish she experienced. Mrs. Coleman walked down the hill to the Pea River Bridge, where she saw furniture and large appliances being swept downstream by the raging river.

Jake Bonneau, lifetime resident of Elba, reminisced about the 1929 flood. In 1929 many people were trapped in the second floor of stores and homes for two days. During this time they had no food or water. In 1990, no one was trapped in this manner, and no lives were lost, unlike the '29 flood when at least two lives were lost.



Water streams over levee on northside of town.



Within an hour — the break in the levee had become a raging river.



Water fills Miller Memorial Stadium.



Water rushing south down Claxton.



Flag flies proudly out of flood water in front of the Elba Courthouse.

FLOOD REACTION AT COURTHOUSE

By: Marion B. Brunson,
Judge of Probate

● I was one of the many citizens of Elba and Coffee County who felt very secure about the levee having the ability to hold back flood water. On the morning of March 17, 1990, I could not believe my eyes when I stood at the bottom of Brunson Hill and looked across the bridge into town and saw river water everywhere.

I stood there with tears in my eyes and praying after the initial shock. Panic over county records being under water filled my thoughts. The Probate Judge is the custodian of county records and this responsibility was overwhelming as I gazed at the flood water.

All of us who resided on the East side of Pea River were cut off from town and the majority of Elba citizens. Being without electricity and water, we ate at the outpost located in the parking lot of Hayes Funeral Home. I was so upset over the devastation that all I could do was worry and cry.

In addition to worry over county records, I was concerned over our beautiful courthouse and how hard we had worked to make it beautiful and a source of pride for all residents of Coffee County. There was great concern for my personal landmarks collection of paintings by Mary Louise Collier, hanging in the halls of the courthouse.

Personal antiques were in several offices throughout the first floor of the courthouse.

Since I could not sleep, I went down to the bridge soon after daylight on Sunday morning. I was soon followed by Nancy, my wife. Being a public official, the Conservation Department agreed to take me around town in a boat. Nancy and I walked across Pea River bridge with flood water touching the bottom of it, and we got into the motor boat near the end of the bridge behind the post office.

As we went around the square, the most moving thing I saw was the flag flying proudly out of flood water in front of the courthouse. Water was almost to the second story windows of the

courthouse. Later in the week we were allowed to enter and face the chaos of mud and disaster. Tears, thanksgiving over no loss of life, and prayers for strength and endurance for all of the citizens of Elba were uppermost in my mind as I first entered our historic courthouse.

● J.A. Carnley was Probate Judge of Coffee County during the 1929 flood. The following is an excerpt from a letter Judge Carnley wrote to the U. S. Congress and Alabama Governor Bibb Graves.

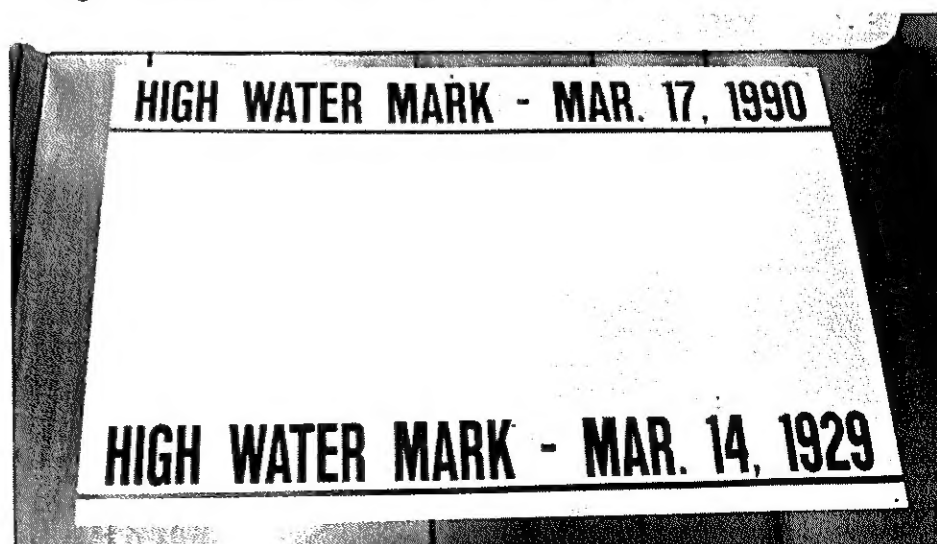
In behalf of our people, I am urging the demands for relief, and I trust that you can devise means of help by the strong arms of our federal government. The strong arm should help the weak, protect, preserve and prosper them again. We shall be grateful to you.

*Yours respectfully,
J. A. Carnley*

An article written by Judge Carnley in the May 9, 1929 edition of the *Elba Clipper* showed his concern for the people. The following is an excerpt.

It was distressing to see the people as the boats would land them. No photographer can picture, no pen can portray and no artist can paint the distress which I saw in the faces of the people. People were rescued from trees, shaken and falling buildings.

High water marks showing contrast in water depth of 1929 & 1990 floods.



HOW COURTHOUSE RECORDS WERE SALVAGED

● After the flood, records on the bottom floor of the courthouse were devastated. These records included the circuit and district court case files, both civil and criminal, all other records of the circuit clerk's office, records in the probate office, including deeds, mortgages, etc., and county commission records.

A company named MCI in Fort Worth, Texas, does restorative and disaster related work. MCI sent large refrigerated trucks to Elba, immediately placing all records in these trucks to freeze them. By freezing the records it prevented any further deterioration from mold, mildew, water, etc. The frozen records were taken to the company's headquarters in Fort Worth, Texas, where the various records were placed in a large bullet-shaped, cylindrical tank, much resembling a propane gas tank.

Inside the tank, the pressure is drastically lowered until a vacuum exists. The records remain inside this vacuum for some time until they are actually "freeze dried." The vacuum causes the water in the records to be converted to gas and the gas simply dissipates/evaporates. Once this occurs the records are completely dry and ready for further processing.

The records are then removed from the vacuum. The mud, dirt, etc., is simply scraped off and cleaned by hand by workers using various cleaning supplies, brushes, rags, etc. In shorthand language this is how the records were preserved.

This information was submitted by Circuit Judge Terry Butts.

REFLECTIONS ON THE FLOOD AND ITS AFTERMATH

By: Drexel Cook

My impressions on the flood in March 1990 vary greatly. My first impression came Sunday, March 18. My



Cook Chevrolet submerged in flood waters.



Vans from Cook Chevrolet floated due to air pockets.



Receding waters left automobiles in disarray.

son, Jim, and I waded in waist deep water down Claxton Avenue. At the Army Reserve Center we climbed into a boat and were carried to Cook Chevrolet, our family business since 1966. I can not recall any exchange of words, but I do remember the sinking feeling inside as we looked at our place. It was almost completely covered in water. Fifteen vehicles were barely visible, except for the vans which were floating at ninety degree angles because of air trapped in their roofs.

Moving down Claxton Avenue to the People's Bank, a business our family has been associated with since it was chartered, we found it completely under water. As we viewed the rest of the downtown business section, our feelings were a mixture of frustration, helplessness and self-pity. We said what others must have said, "What are we gonna do?"

Later that day or the next, while we were busy cleaning out my home, which was also destroyed, Jim and I came to a sobering realization. It was simply this, "Hey, we're feeling as if we are the only ones hurt in this flood and that's not the way it is. Every citizen of our town is hurt, to a greater or lesser degree, the result is we are all in it together and we will pull out of it together." From these thoughts our whole perspective changed and we commenced developing a positive attitude.

We were somewhat disappointed that most of the advice we received about rebuilding our business was negative. To many, Elba's future was very much in doubt. Even General Motors expressed doubts about our business future to the extent that they offered to close Elba as a franchise point if we so desired. In candor, I must say that Jim and I never had any doubts. We had firmly resolved, in our small way, to do our part in rebuilding Elba. We made our decision for the simplest of all reasons, namely, Elba is our home and we take great pride in our City. We love our community and it's where I chose to raise my kids and it's where Jim chooses to raise his. We believe that most of Elba's citizens rebuilt for these or similar reasons.



Elba High School was one of several buildings to experience its second flood.

● The Elba City School System had grown from a one campus to a three campus school system, between 1919 and 1990. Of the three structures existing in 1990, only the senior high school building had been through the '29 flood. Unlike the 1990 flood, in 1929 the building was not under water for three days. Thus making it possible to clean the building with mops and hoses and resume classes in about three weeks. According to Mrs. Mary Carnley the school received books donated from around the state and the students spent the next several weeks writing thank you notes. The students of Elba also wrote thank you notes for donated books and materials after the 1990 flood. After the '29 flood, the school was unable to have a football team the following year. After the 1990 flood the school, not only had a football team, but had a winning season and made it to the quarter finals of the state championship playoff. Games were played at the Miller Memorial Stadium.

Westside Baptist Church's gym became the site of basketball games for the 8th and 9th grade teams for the 1990-91 school year because of the destruction of the high school gym. The varsity and junior varsity basketball teams played their season for 1990-91 in the Enterprise State Junior College gym in Enterprise, Alabama. The varsity basketball team won the regional tournament and advanced to

the second game of the sub-state tournament. The ninth grade team had a perfect season of 14-0.

The Board of Education met with state Department of Education members and Rep. Jimmy Holley early Monday, March 19, and decided to do whatever was necessary to keep the city system operational.

Elba City Schools reopened March 26, 1990, using temporary facilities which included: Paul Windham's and National Security's hangars at the Elba Airport, the National Guard Armory and tents. In the following weeks trailers were bought providing portable classrooms for grades 1-6, while kindergarten remained in National Security's hangar. Grades 7-12 remained in the Armory and surrounding facilities.

City school buses were still available for use due to the heroic action of Lamar Wilson aided by Bob Hahn, Kenneth Baker, and Bobby Wilson.

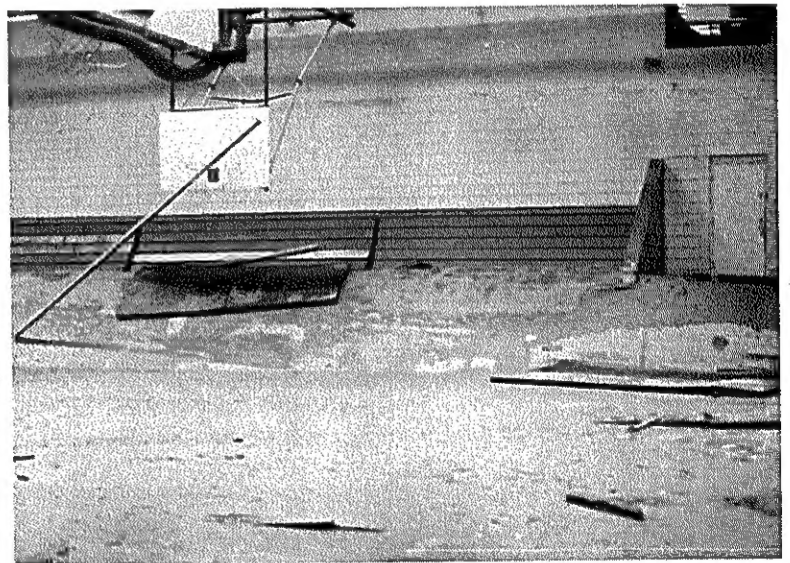
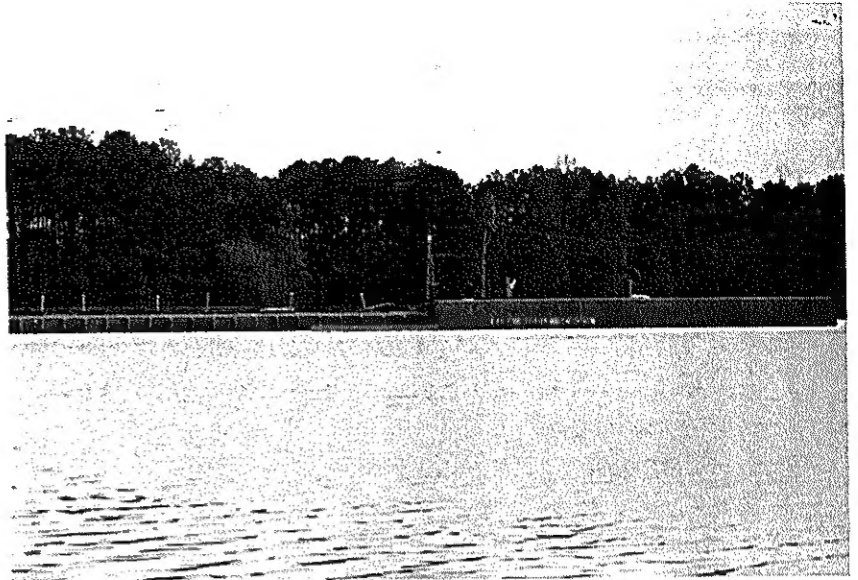
"The last bus rolled out of the downtown area at 6:45 A.M. Saturday, after the levee had broken," Wilson said. "There was water in the school yard when we pulled the last one out," he said, indicating the water was almost knee deep. "There was water in the last bus and in my truck when we left."

The school board purchased trailers to house grades K-12 for the school years of 1990-91 and 1991-92, while a multi-million dollar facility is being built.

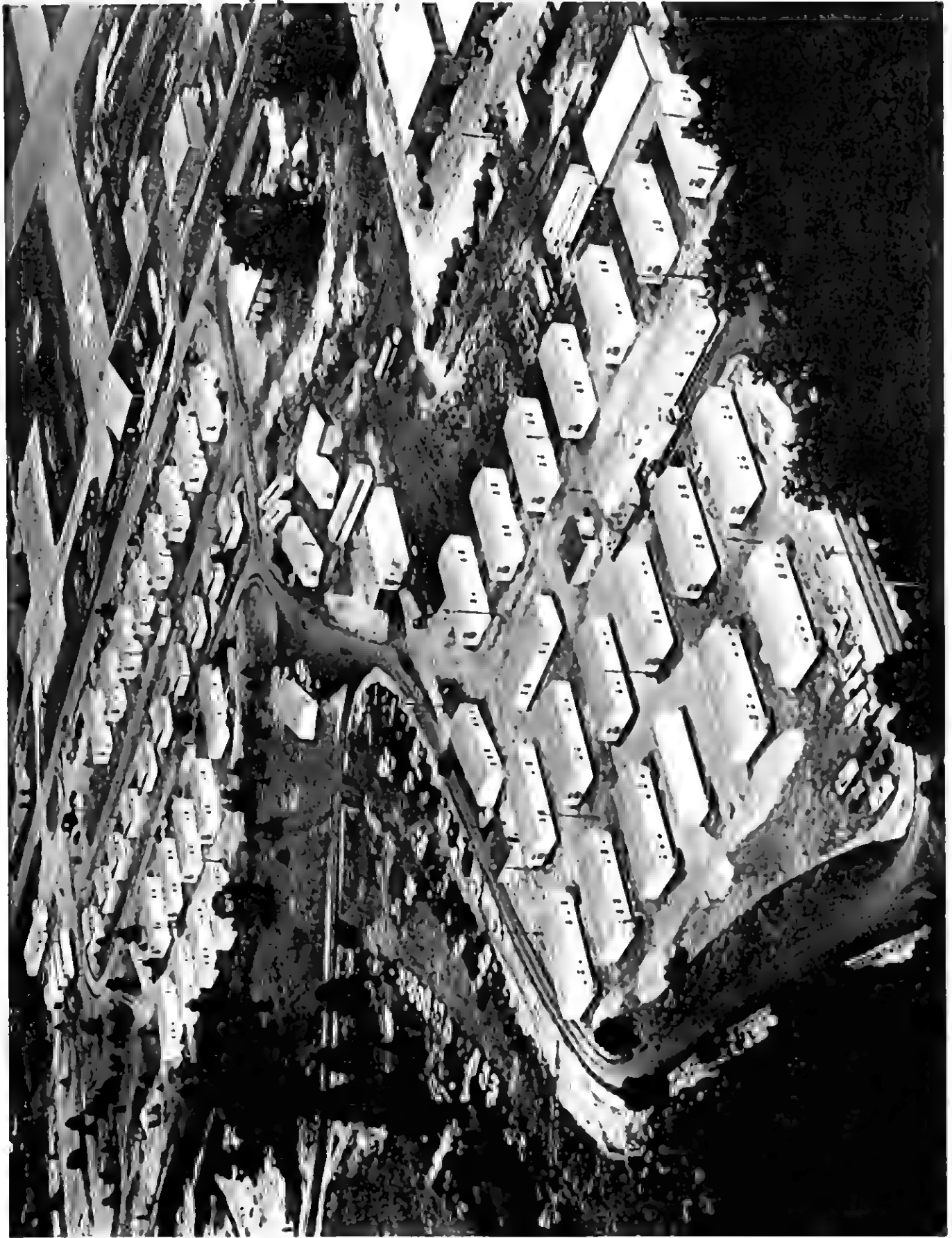
Elba Middle School

Elba Elementary School

Elba High School Gym



Mr. Don Jefferson, Assistant Principal of Elba High School, surveys tents used as classrooms.



An aerial view of the Elba City School System trailer campuses. The school board purchased trailers to house grades K-12 for the school years of 1990-91 and 1991-92, while a multi-million dollar facility is being built.

As the shock began to wear off, we began to realize that, in many ways, nothing would ever be the same.



Hardee's is one of the places memories are made by the town's teenagers.

Manning, another 1990 senior at Elba High School, experienced the anxious feelings of many parents whose children had left Elba for a trip to the beach during A.E.A. holidays. Mrs. Manning did not hear from her son, Michael, from Thursday afternoon March 16 until Sunday night at 9:30 when he returned to Elba. Michael had tried to phone home, only to be told by the operator that there was no Elba; it had washed away.

People were not alone in feeling the effects of the flood. If they could talk, animals would have their stories to tell. When James and Martha Martin left their home on Yelverton Street, Friday night, they left their dog, Garbage, behind. Mr. Martin had been working on his roof earlier in the day. Fortunately for Garbage, he left the ladder propped against the house. As the water rose Saturday morning, Garbage climbed the ladder and onto the roof. The dog was rescued from the roof later in the day by the Opp Rescue Squad.

Mr. Doug Mann of Farris Street returned to his home Saturday morning even though the water was several feet deep. He opened the gate to his dog pen and forced his hunting hounds out of the pen. While Mr. Mann could not carry his dogs to safety, he felt they had a better chance of surviving if they were out of the pen. He was indeed happy when, several days later, the water receded and all of the dogs returned home.

George McIlhaney lived in a house on the bank of Whitewater Creek. He awoke late Friday night and realized the river was out of its banks and rising rapidly. Mr. McIlhaney went outside to unchain his hunting dogs. He only managed to rescue three of the dogs before the water became

*Katie R. Hodge, a 1990 senior at Elba High School shared her thoughts about the flood in an article written for her yearbook, **The Elbala**.*

On March 17, 1990, the story of Noah's ark took on a new meaning to thousands of people. The rain came in forty-eight short hours; then came the waiting. Everyone knew the town was completely inundated, but the damage was still not known. Many of us did not remember very well the floods of 1929 or even 1975. Perhaps, many had the naive thought that the mud would wash off and life would go back to normal. With nothing to base the extent of damage that several feet of muddy river water would do, the town, along with much of the rest of the world, waited.

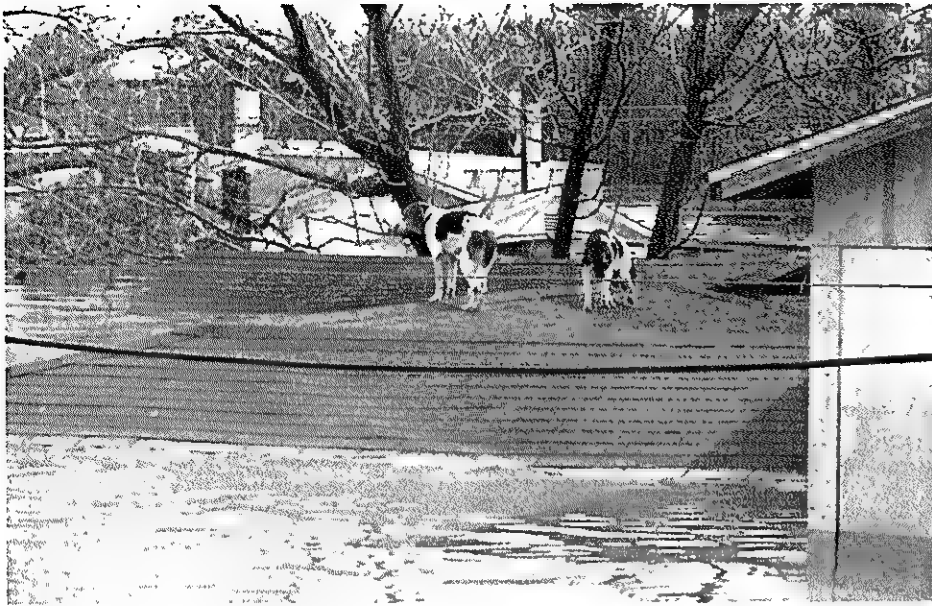
Finally, the water went down and merchants and residents were allowed to return. For some, the last view had been looking back from a tractor at 3 in the morning. Some never heard the signal and escaped, just barely,

when the water filled their houses. Video tape even shows one man hanging on for dear life to a telephone pole, while the water steadily rose.

As the shock began to wear off, we began to realize that, in many ways, nothing would ever be the same. For the numerous television reporters, cameramen, and crews, that swamped the town, the damage was unbelievable. Yet, they truly had no way of understanding the devastation, not only to material goods and buildings, but to peoples' life long memories.

No, in many ways, things will never be the same. As the old saying goes, you can never go back. So we must hold on to the memories and be glad that we were fortunate enough to grow up in a town as uncomplicated and charming as ours. We realize that only the facade of Elba is gone. Nothing could ever destroy our memories or the spirit of our town.

Faye Manning, mother of Michael



These dogs wait out the flood waters on Ronnie Hammond's Body Shop.

threatening. He and the dogs climbed on top of his house. He used his flashlight to attract the attention of a helicopter. Mr. McIlhaney was rescued, but his rescuers refused to take the dogs on board. Mr. McIlhaney returned Saturday morning in a boat to remove his dogs from the house top and take them to safety.

Betty Adkinson found her cat four days after the flood. It was in the wall and still scared. She had to rip out several panels to find the cat.

Mr. Charles Cox had worked until about three in the morning of March 17th, helping those who were flooded

to get their cars out. About 5:00 A.M. he decided he and his wife needed to get to higher ground, they took two vehicles and the clothes on their backs and went up to the Country Convenience store on the Opp Highway. While visiting with others there Charles remembered he had left their dog tied in the salvage yard and decided to go back after him. While Charles untied the dog his wife ran into the house and picked up a few pictures. This dog was not one to ride in the car, but when Charles opened the door he didn't waste any time jumping in ready to go.

Another article printed in the *Elba*

Clipper on April 25, 1929, was entitled "Pathetic, Unusual, Amusing Incidents of the Elba Flood." The following is an excerpt.

Sixteen people marooned in the upstairs of a house without food began to grow hungry. A number of children were in the party. A cow came flopping along and managed to get footing on the porch. Mrs. Cow was gotten upstairs and two and a half gallons of milk was secured for the children. While this was going on, a chicken flew in a window. It was captured, killed, cooked and eaten.

When the water receded from town, the local banks, with many local volunteers, set up shifts in guarding the banks at night until the most important valuables could be removed. State Representative Jimmy Holley had a shift at one of the local banks from 10:00 P.M. until 12:00 P.M. on the first night that said shifts were arranged. Floodlights were set up in the banks' parking lots trained on the bank to illuminate the area.

At 10:30 P.M., local Circuit Judge Terry Butts drove to the bank. Representative Holley was guarding, intentionally driving into the parking lot at a faster rate of speed than normal, immediately screeching to a halt, jumping from the truck and running to where Holley was sitting. Judge Butts said to Holley, "Jimmy, I came just as quickly as I possibly could." Holley, thinking something was terribly amiss called, "What is it? What's the matter?" Butts responded, "Well, I heard that you were guarding the money, so I came to watch you."



Betty Hudson sifting through debris at SouthTrust Bank.



The Fleetwood Carnley home and the SouthTrust Bank on Collier Street. The Carnley home experienced its second flood.



The Peoples Bank, with its name half submerged, peers out of the muddy flood waters.

Only 13 of the town's businesses were operational immediately after the flood.

Hilda C. Allen remembered the inconvenience of out of town shopping. The people had to drive to another town for the most basic of items. There was rejoicing when a grocery store reopened in August.

Of the 130 businesses destroyed by flood waters, many business owners also received damage to their homes. Pictures were available of the following businesses:



Top Right: Wayne Sutley, Manager of Skinner's, experienced a flooded business and home. All of the furniture stores experienced some flooding.

Right: Butch and Marsha Oggs lost two businesses, and their home. Three of the town's four drug stores were flooded.



Bottom Left: Waylon and Betty Adkinson lost their business, the Big Bear, and their home to flood waters.

Bottom Right: The town lost its phone service from 7:00 A.M. March 17th until approximately two weeks later.



Michele Cox, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Ferrin Cox owner of the Elba Clipper wrote a story about a wedding planned for March 17th and which did actually take place on March 17, 1990. The following is Ms. Cox's story as reprinted from the Franklin County Times.

THIS MARRIAGE SHOULD LAST FOREVER AND EVER.... AMEN

Her wedding dress, his parents' home, and the downtown, Elba, Alabama, church in which they were to be married were all under water, but Aleah and Blue postponed their wedding only three hours last Saturday.

They've been sweethearts forever, it seems. They were in the same class, attended the same church, went to the prom together. They were buddies. When she went to Auburn and he went to Alabama, they continued to see each other.

Most of their friends expected they'd get married one day, especially after he left a job in Mobile last summer to move closer to her in Atlanta. Few were surprised when for Christmas he gave her a diamond.

"I'm proud of him," his daddy said after the engagement was announced. "He's caught himself a good one...I told him if he didn't hurry up and give

her a ring, she was gonna get away."

In early February, the groom's father had a heart attack and spent several days in the hospital. Later in the month, the bride was promoted, and wasn't even sure she could get her wedding day off. But the family proceeded with wedding plans.

Saturday, despite a devastating flood, they became husband and wife.

"At about 10 o'clock, I sat down with the children and said, 'It's your wedding, what do you want to do,'" the bride's mother said Saturday night. "Aleah said she wanted to get married today and Blue agreed."

Quickly, plans were made to move the wedding to a Methodist Chapel located north of the flooded City of Elba. A neighbor and a creative bridesmaid decorated the tiny church with azaleas, bridal wreath and other flowers in season.

The bride went to the nearest working telephone — 10 or 15 miles away and phoned her aunt across the river in Enterprise. Two hours before the wedding and an 85 mile detour around flooded bridges later, her Aunt Nina produced two wedding dresses, two bouquets from which to choose and two bridesmaids dresses which hadn't yet been picked up.

The wedding cakes were on high ground and friends and neighbors pitched in and produced punch, crackers, dip, fruit and other party food from their pantries: both grocery stores

were under water. Somebody went to the county line and bought all the available champagne. More flowers were picked from unflooded yards. And the mother of one of the groomsmen graciously agreed to host the reception.

Bridesmaids who had flown in from across the country were incredulous. Natives of larger cities, they couldn't believe the way small-town folks rallied and helped. Friends who earlier in the day had escaped their homes with only the clothes on their backs — no pajamas, no toothbrush, no belongings — attended anyway.

"I must think a lot of you two," a neighbor of the groom chuckled. "I had to borrow underwear to come to this wedding."

At dusk, traditional wedding music was played on the upright piano in the little chapel and a choir of crickets joined in. The bridesmaids — one of whose home was submerged — wept almost uncontrollably.

"We liked it better than if it was the way we planned it," Blue said after it was over. "We could see everybody."

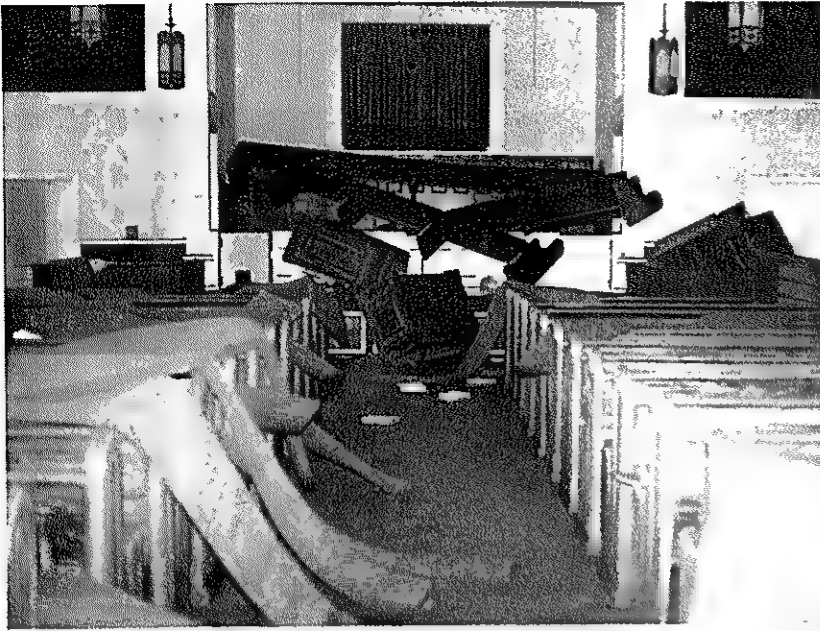
Indeed, they could. As if it had been planned that way for months, every seat was taken, but no one had to stand.

And when they repeated the traditional vows, pledging to love, honor and cherish until separated by death, there were silent nods of agreement among the congregation members.

Considering the odds they've already overcome, this marriage should last forever.

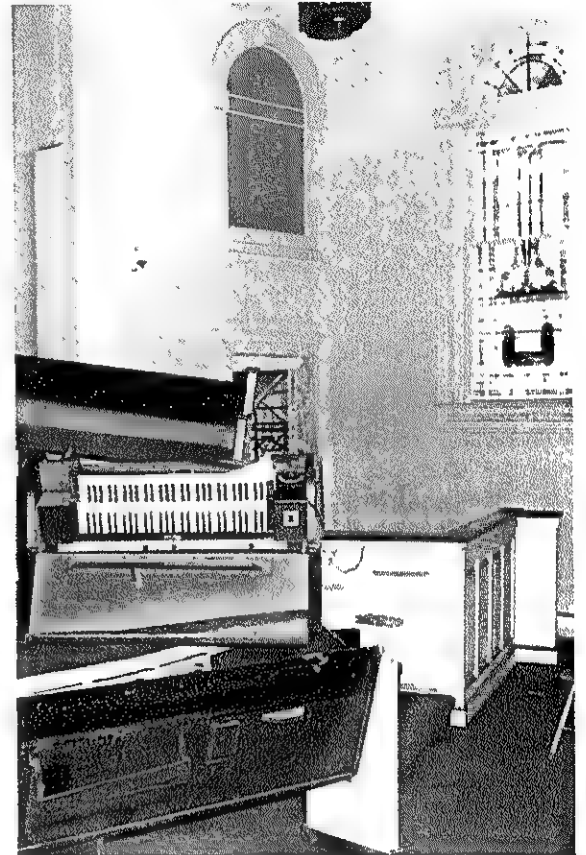


The Elba United Methodist Church had been decorated for a wedding.



Left: Interior of Westside Baptist Church.

Below: Sanctuary of First Baptist Church.

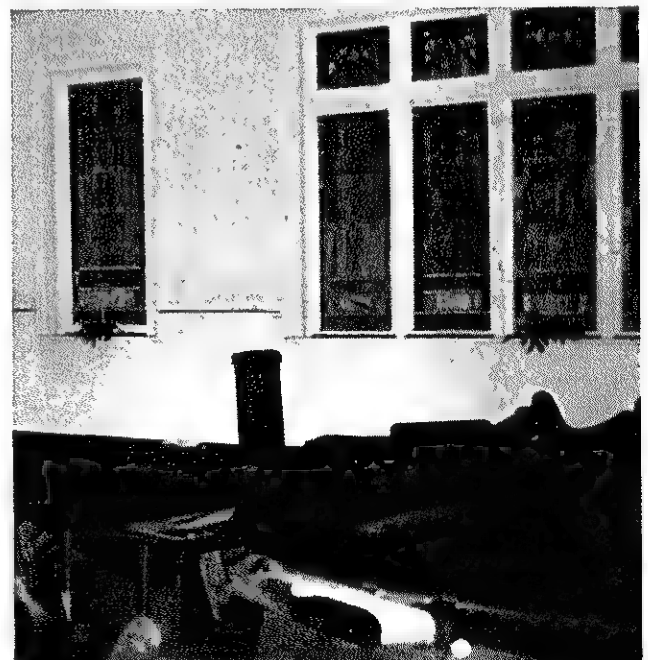
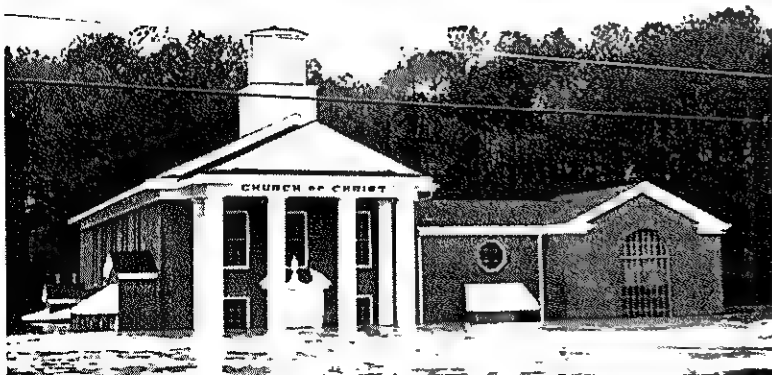


Eight of Elba's churches suffered flood damage. One of those, the Elba United Methodist, had been through the flood of 1929. Whitewater Baptist was one of the churches outside the flood zone. Edna Sue Stinson expressed a special thanks to Whitewater Baptist for providing a free day care in the days following the flood. This allowed adults to do the much needed work of cleaning homes, stores and property.

On Sunday, March 18th, the people of Elba held a well attended community wide church service at the Assembly of God on Highland Drive. The Assembly of God became a headquarters for refuge and relief in the weeks after the flood.

Below Right: Interior of Elba United Methodist Church.

Below Left: Church of Christ.



Elba was visited by the Governor, senators, congressmen and state legislators. Governor Hunt and State Senator Crum Foshee were given an aerial tour of the flooded area Sunday morning, March 18, around 9:30 A.M. State Representative Jimmy Holley was on the ground to meet the Governor. He had been up all night working with those handling the evacuation. U. S. Senators Howell Heflin and Richard Shelby flew over Elba and viewed the flood waters before landing and joining the Governor.

After a short meeting with city officials, the Governor signed the declaration declaring Elba a disaster area so those affected by the flood would be eligible for federal aid.

Congressman Bill Dickinson toured the city by air during the high water Saturday, March 17. He returned Saturday morning, March 24, and toured Elba by motorcade. He stopped at several points and viewed the damage on foot.

All the governmental officials touring the city assured city and county officials that they would do everything within their power to aid the victims of the flood.

Within hours after the word went out that the City of Elba had flooded, assistance began to converge on Elba from all directions.

The Red Cross came as early as Friday, March the 16th. It began to coordinate with Coffee County Department of Human Resources, Health Department and Department of Mental Health in setting up shelter facilities and food services.

The Red Cross Shelter located in the First Assembly of God Church reported that they fed 3,000 plus daily and housed approximately 50 individuals in the shelter. That included personnel manning the different service centers and vehicles operated by the Red Cross.

The local Alabama National Guard Unit was fully mobilized and began rescue efforts plus providing any other services within their capability.

Alabama State Troopers began to make their way toward Elba to assist the local city and county law enforce-

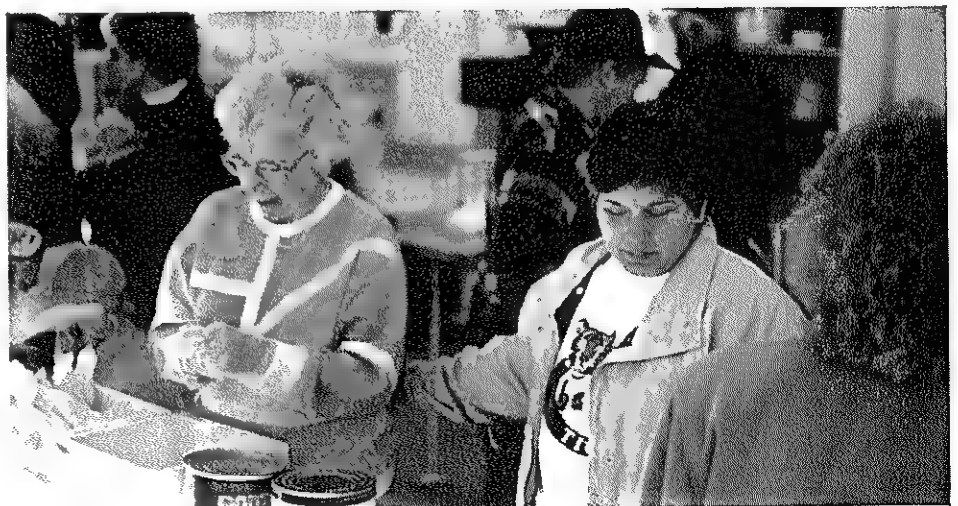
Representative Jimmy Holley introduces Gov. Guy Hunt and Senator Howell Heflin.



The Assembly of God Church became one of the relief headquarters.



Serving at the Baptist Convention Relief Trailer food line were Ruth Inman and Sam Bradley.





ment agencies who were already being stretched thin and had been without sleep or even a break for almost 72 hours.

Elba's own State Trooper Ronnie Whitworth worked untiringly. He and his men had the unspeakable task of keeping people who had no business downtown from getting there. This was hard to do without stepping on some toes; even those who had a need to go into town were sometimes barred from the area. As bad as it seemed to those who had lost a business or a home in the downtown area, it was necessary in order to keep looters out.

Elba's Police Department headed by Chief Freddie Hanchey, was aided by police officers from surrounding towns.

Fire departments from Opp, Dothan, Enterprise, Ft. Rucker, New Brockton, Bullock, Zion Chapel, Five Star and many others sent pumpers in, not only to provide fire protection, but to assist businesses and home owners in washing out their buildings.

The Civil Air Patrol sent in units to provide assistance in search missions and also in transporting officials.

Ft. Rucker provided choppers for search and rescue and also for observation flights for officials to survey the devastation. Man power and equipment were also sent into the area from Ft. Rucker.

EMA (Emergency Management Agency) personnel began immediately surveying the damage. They, upon seeing that it was going to be extensive, called in FEMA (Federal

Top Left: Serving at the Baptist Convention Relief Trailer food line were Pam Bedsole, Liz Murdock, Melanie Roberson, and Gina Bedsole.

Above: National Guardsmen unloading mattresses sent to Elba.

Right: In National Security's hangar, Lynn Baker, Grant Coleman, Alan Roberson, and others organize clothes to be given to flood victims.



The National Guard Armory became a collection center.



Judge Butts, security liaison between local officials and military police units, addressed the crowd before allowing anyone into town on Tuesday, March 20th.



The crowd at the armory waiting for information before entering town.



Emergency Management Agency representatives.

The Corp of Engineers came in and began inspecting the levee damage; also, they began to take action to repair it and to assist in other work.

Supplies rolled in by the trailer loads from businesses like Wal-Mart, West Point Pepperell, M. O. Carrol, Crystal Lake Broom Company, Kleinert's Sunshine Mills, Scrivner (Big Bear Foods), individuals and many others.

The Alabama Baptist Association fed thousands of meals every day from their mobile disaster relief van. They operated from a tractor trailer unit built in 1981 by Dorsey Trailers. The Salvation Army had several units stationed around the area feeding the flood victims and their clean-up helpers.

Mrs. JoAnn Cannon commented on the kindness of others to the people of Elba in the following paragraph.

Those of us on the east side of the river were fed for nearly two weeks by the Westgate merchants of Enterprise. Their food stand was operating the second day of the flood and provided meals until late at night. There was a feeling of comradeship at the Hayes Funeral Home parking lot as we ate what they so generously provided and then took advantage of the free long distance telephone service.

March the 18th, the flood waters carved a 175 foot notch in the levee on South Claxton. The levee also broke at other places, including the bridge at Hwy. 84 and in New Town.

The citizens of Elba were not allowed to enter the downtown area until Tuesday, March 20. A public assembly was held at the National Guard Armory on Tuesday.

Once the waters receded, Elba was faced with the awesome task of cleaning and repairing. No one will forget the stench of the mud which covered the town, but the blessings outweighed the horror. One being the assistance received from each other and from people all over the United States. In the days, weeks and even months ahead people came to Elba to help. Many donated money, time and energy to help clean and repair.

Naturally I was very upset. I walked around the upturned desk and shined my light on the body.

There was also humor amid the horror. Sonny Inman, Captain of the Elba Rescue Squad, shared this story.

"As I looked into my office, I noted that the furniture had been turned upside down by the force of the water. I shined my flashlight on the floor where my desk was and saw the feet and legs of a person lying on the floor. I could not see the upper portion of the body. My immediate thought was, 'My Lord, a body has floated into the office which we didn't know about.' Naturally I was very upset. I walked around the upturned desk and shined my light on the body. It was then that I realized it was the Resusi-Annie, a dummy we used to train in CPR classes."

A gazebo had been built on the northeast side of the courthouse square a few years before the flood. When the waters receded, the gazebo was found on Factory Street, one block south of the courthouse. It was carried back to the square and now rests on the southwest side of the courthouse. This task was accomplished with man power, but some structures could not be found, much less replaced.

Upon returning home, Texie Farris discovered her apartment building had washed away. She didn't even have anything to clean! This had occurred when the levee broke on the south side of town, March 18th, allowing the waters to begin to recede. Also at this

break the law offices of Garth Lindsey and Debbie Jared were swept away to leave only a cement slab.

One thing that had to be repaired as quickly as possible was the levee. The Corps of Engineers arrived in Elba on Sunday, March 18. It was Wednesday, March 21, before they could be put to work. Mike Jared, Colonel Kenneth Strong of the U. S. Army Reserve, Captain Greg Oglesby of the Alabama National Guard, and Dawson Farris began immediately working with the Corps of Engineers and within days the breaks in the levee were repaired. Within a few weeks the entire levee was strengthened and raised by several inches.



Volunteers came by the hundreds and were appreciated by the 4,500 residents of Elba. Volunteers clean at the corner of Factory and Simmons.

There were jobs to be done that had never even been thought of before March 17th.



Left: Corp of Engineer workmen work with heavy equipment to repair break in the levee at the Elba Elementary School.

Below: The task of cleaning seemed endless, as seen from Haywood Drug.



Top Right: Landscaping of City Hall in disarray after the flood. In the background Bradley's Florist is visible.

Center: As others, Tom Maddox was unable to make any pre-flood preparations at the Jewel Box; however, almost all the merchandise was recovered and cleaned up for sale. As the picture indicates most of the expensive store fixtures and equipment in his business were discarded.

Below: Inside Dixie Printing the flood left its destructive mark. The owners, Cabert and Linda Mills found videos from Family Videoz, all types of shoes and clothing from Martins, Inc. and even a tire which had washed in breaking a window in the door as it made its entrance.

Bottom Right: Soldiers from Ft. Rucker returned the gazebo to the square.





Millions of gallons of water, tons of mud, nor any of a multitude of other problems deterred Dorsey Trailer employees from their mission of building cargo trailers in their Elba plant.

Company records indicated that Dorsey Trailer employees spent approximately 145,000 manhours cleaning up the plant following the flood.

Dorsey representatives attacked the flood problem on two fronts instantly. One group worked to clean up the mud from the plant while another waded through the red tape of the Small Business Administration (SBA) to secure a record \$25 million dollar disaster loan to insure the plant's continued operation.

Large crowd gathered at Dorsey Trailers open house to hear report from officials.

Congressman Bill Dickinson and Governor Guy Hunt presented \$25 million dollar check to Dorsey officials from SBA at company gathering in June.



Mayor Moore told those present "Elba will be back, even better than it was before the flood."

In the months following the flood, two "old-fashioned" town meetings were sponsored by Mayor Fred Moore and the City Council.

Randy Bedsole, Councilman, organized and acted as MC for the first town meeting in April. The purpose of this gathering was to encourage and assure the public that Elba would recover. Mayor Moore told those present "Elba will be back, even better than it was before the flood."

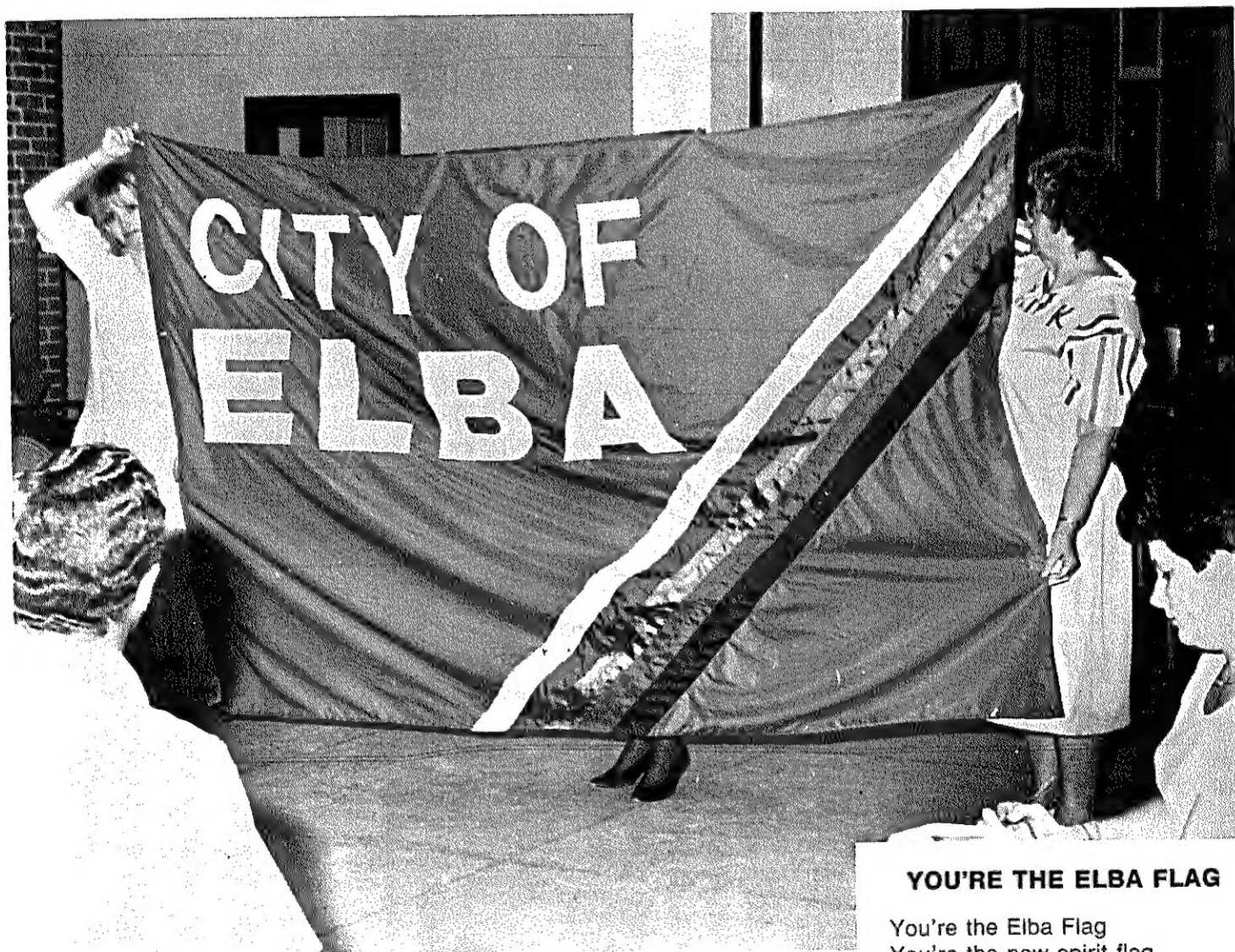
As Butch Oggs sang "*Amazing Grace*," tears slid down the cheeks of many as they joined hands and sang with him.

Also, the flag that had flown over the courthouse during the flood of 1990 was presented to Judge Marion Brunson to be preserved for the future.



The flag that had flown over the courthouse during the flood of 1990 was presented to Judge Marion Brunson to be preserved for the future.

Liz Murdock composed and sang *"You're The Elba Flag"*. The words of the song signified the renewed spirit of Elba.



Suze Butts and Gene Kennett display flag.

During the second town meeting in August, a presentation of a city flag was made. This flag was designed by Gene Kennett, Suze Butts and Myrna Rhoades. The flag was made by Edna Brunson and Susie Stokes and symbolized hope for the people of Elba. The flag has a green stripe symbolizing a new beginning, a brown

stripe symbolizing endurance, and a red stripe for courage, a purple stripe for faith, a blue stripe for loyalty and a yellow stripe for a brighter tomorrow.

Liz Murdock composed and sang *"You're The Elba Flag"*. The words of the song signified the renewed spirit of Elba.

YOU'RE THE ELBA FLAG

You're the Elba Flag
 You're the new spirit flag
 and may faith and growth
 come your way.
 You're the emblem of the town
 renewed — the home of the
 steadfast and brave.
 Every heart beats fast under
 colors so true.
 Where there's always a victory.
 Should courage, hope, and
 faith grow dim.....
 Keep your eyes on the Elba Flag.



An aerial view of downtown Elba as it appeared one year after the flood.

A year has passed and while much has been done, there is still more to do, but none could disagree with Mrs. JoAnn Cannon's sentiments. Mrs. Cannon considers the strength of Elba to be in the real concern the people have for each other and the support they give each other in time of need.

After the flood, a sign was nailed to a utility pole on the southeast corner of the courthouse square which read,

**Everything
Lost, but we'll be
Back
Again.**

This indeed was to prove true as this photograph indicates.